

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 AID-05 ACDA-07 IO-13 OMB-01

EB-08 /099 W

-----260923Z 121178 /12

P R 260800Z APR 77

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8942

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANILA 6263

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, LY, RP, XF

SUBJECT: DEFENSE SECRETARY EMPHASIZES THE POSITIVE IN CURRENT MNLF/
ISLAMIC/GOP NEGOTIATIONS

1. MONDAY NIGHT, APRIL 25, DEFENSE SECRETARY PONCE-ENRILE WAS EXTRAORDINARILY BULLISH ABOUT THE CURRENT ROUND OF MNLF/ISLAMIC QUADRIPARTITE/GOP NEGOTIATIONS IN MANILA; DEFENSE UNDERSECRETARY BARBERO CONCEDED THAT PROSPECTS COULD BE PROMISING. PAF CHIEF OF STAFF ESPINO JUST GRUNTED, AND A COUPLE OF SHREWD FORMER PHILIPPINE AMBASSADORS (LAGDAMEO AND AQUINO) PERMITTED THEMSELVES SKEPTICAL ASIDES. THE SETTING WAS ENRILE'S FAREWELL DINNER FOR THE SULLIVANS; PRESENT WAS THE TOP POLITICAL-MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT, BUT ENRILE DID THE TALKING.

2. ACCORDING TO ENRILE, WHO IS CHAIRING "BOTH" PHILIPPINE NEGOTIATING PANELS IN THE ABSENCE OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
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SECRETARY ROMULO, TWO-THIRDS OF THE PROBLEMS CONCERNING AGREEMENT HAVE BEEN SETTLED, AND AN ATMOSPHERE OF TRUST AND ACCOMMODATION HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED SUFFICIENT TO RESOLVE SUCH REMAINING ISSUES AS COMPOSITION OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT, STRUCTURE OF MILITARY FORCES, POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF AUTONOMY, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. ENRILE EXPECTED INTENSE NEGOTIATIONS WOULD CONTINUE UNTIL PRESIDENT

MARCOS' RETURN AT THE END OF APRIL. HE SAID THAT EVEN IF A FINAL AGREEMENT HAD NOT BEEN REACHED BY THAT TIME, SUFFICIENT PROGRESS WOULD HAVE BEEN MADE TO ESTABLISH PHILIPPINE GOOD FAITH BEFORE THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE SCHEDULED TO CONVENE IN TRIPOLI IN MID-MAY.

3. ENRILE SAID THAT THE OPENING OF TALKS FRIDAY, APRIL 22, WAS MARRED BY A SUSPICIOUS ATMOSPHERE AND DIFFICULT EXCHANGE; SATURDAY THINGS LOOSENED CONSIDERABLY; SUNDAY GOOD FEELING PREVAILED DESPITE TOUGH BARGAINING WHICH LED TO LIBYAN FOREIGN MINISTER ALI TURAYKI REQUESTING AND OBTAINING AN AUDIENCE WITH PRESIDENT MARCOS (AT WHICH, ACCORDING TO THE ITALIAN AMBASSADOR, ALI TURAYKI PRESENTED AND MARCOS REJECTED A DRAFT AGREEMENT); MONDAY HOWEVER SEEMS TO HAVE SEEN SEVERAL PARTIAL BREAKTHROUGHS. FOR EXAMPLE, ENRILE SAID, THE MNLF DEMANDED THAT THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT BE LED FOR A TRANSITION PERIOD OF SIX YEARS BY SEVEN MNLF MEMBERS AND FOUR OTHER PERSONS, TWO OF WHOM WOULD BE DESIGNATED BY THE MNLF; THE QUADRI-PARTITE MEDIATORS, WHO ACCORDING TO ENRILE OFTEN SPEAK AND NEGOTIATE FOR THE MNLF, CONSIDERED THE MNLF POSITION EXCESSIVE, AND PROPOSED INSTEAD SEVEN MNLF AND FOUR NON-MUSLIMS FOR A TWO YEAR TRANSITION. ENRILE SAID HE COUNTER-PROPOSED SEVEN MUSLIMS, OF WHOM FOUR WOULD BE MNLF, PLUS FOUR NON-MUSLIMS, FOR A TRANSITION PERIOD TO BE DETERMINED BY PRESIDENT MARCOS. ENRILE WAS ENCOURAGED THAT THE QUADRI-PARTITE GROUP SEEMED TO FIND HIS PROPOSAL ATTRACTIVE. SIMILARLY, ACCORDING TO ENRILE, THE DISCUSSION ON THE CONFIDENTIAL

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CREATION OF AN MNLF ARMED FORCE ENVISAGED A FORMATION OF 1,500 (GOP)POSITION) TO 3,000 (MNLF POSITION) TO BE CREATED UNDER ITS OWN CHIEF OF STAFF REPORTING DIRECTLY TO PRESIDENT MARCOS, AGAIN ON A TRANSITIONAL BASIS LOOKING TO EVENTUAL INCORPORATION AS A SEPARATE UNIT INTO THE PAF, AND CHARGED AMONG OTHER THINGS WITH THE DISARMAMENT OF ALL REBEL FORCES. AS TO THE GEOGRAPHY OF AUTONOMY, ENRILE THOUGHT IT MIGHT BE ONE OR TWO AREAS AND, IN ANY EVENT, HE SEEMED TO DISMISS THE RECENT PLEBISCITE AIRILY, WITHOUT INDICATING HOW THAT MIGHT BE DONE IN A WAY ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS. AS TO ECONOMIC ARRANGEMENTS, ENRILE SAID FOREIGN DONORS WOULD BE ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE DIRECT TO THE AUTONOMOUS AREA(S) PROVIDED ONLY THAT PRIOR APPROVAL

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WAS OBTAINED FROM THE GOP. HE ADDED THAT ACCELERATED
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING FOR THE AUTONOMOUS AREA (S)
IS ALREADY UNDER WAY. IN GENERAL ENRILE INDICATED THE
MNLF HAD RECEDED VERY SIGNIFICANTLY FROM THE ORIGINAL
DEMANDS.

4. ENRILE WENT OUT OF HIS WAY TO FIND SOMETHING POSITIVE
TO SAY ABOUT EACH OF THE QUADRIPARTITE MEDIATING GROUP
AND TO MAKE ALLOWANCES FOR THE MNLF MEMBERS' "UNDERSTANDABLE"
LACK OF SOPHISTICATION AND INABILITY TO ARTICULATE VIEWS.
(THE ONLY COMMENT VOLUNTEERED BY BARBERO WAS THAT THE
VISITING NEGOTIATORS SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN MELLOWED BY WINE,
WOMEN AND HOSPITALITY.) ENRILE CONFIRMED THAT MNLF LEADER
NUR MISUARI IS IN KUALA LUMPUR.

5. COMMENT: IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO EXAGGERATE THE
UPBEAT TONE OF ENRILE'S COMMENTARY AS WELL AS HIS APPARENT
SATISFACTION WITH HIS OWN ROLE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS. THIS
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WAS ALL THE MORE SURPRISING GIVEN THAT HERETOFORE ENRILE
HAS BEEN MOST SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE TRIPOLI AGREEMENT. ENRILE
PRESUMABLY IS NOT ONE TO HAVE HIS HEAD TURNED EASILY TO
EUPHORIA BY A FEW DAYS OF NEGOTIATION IN WHAT HE ACKNOWLEDGES
COULD STILL BE A PROTRACTED PROCESS. BUT EVIDENTLY HE HAS

PERCEIVED SOME CAUSE TO REVERSE HIMSELF AND JUMP ON THE BANDWAGON OF THE POSITIVE. PERHAPS, AS HE INADVERTENTLY MAY HAVE ADMITTED, THIS IS BECAUSE THE GOP RECOGNIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSUADING THE WORLD THAT IT HAS BEEN SINCERE AND FORTHCOMING IN THE SEARCH FOR PEACE. BUT THE UNMITIGATED ENTHUSIASM HE VEIDENCED IN THE PRESENCE OF SENIOR COLLEAGUES CONCERNING THE TALKS AND THEIR PROSPECTS SUGGEST AT LEAST SOME CONVICTION, OR PERHPAS MORE DISCIPLINE IN TOEING THE PRESIDENTIAL LINE THAN HE HAD PREVIOUSLY DEMONSTRATED. ENRILE READILY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT A QUICK FIX THAT DIDN'T LAST WOULD BE WORSE THAN NO AGREEMENT AT ALL.

6. IT SEEMS THAT PRESIDENT MARCOS MAY HAVE HIS MILITARY ON BOARD, HOWEVER RELUCTANTLY, AND THAT HE BELIEVES THE MNLF CAN BE MANAGED, THAT HE IS CONFIDENT OF PERSUADING THE PUBLIC, AND THAT HE HAS HOPES THAT THE QUADRIpartite GROUP, WHICH HE SEEMED TO EQUATE WITH THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE, WILL ACCEPT HIS EVEIDENCE OF GOOD INTENTIONS. AMONG THESE SEVERAL CONSIDERATIONS, THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE AND THERFORE THE QUADRIpartite GROUP IN PHILIPPINE THINKING, MAY WELL HAVE PRIORITY IN MARCOS STRATEGY AND THEREFORE BE THE CURRENT FOCUS OF GOP ATTENTION.

7. ENRILE DENIED THAT THERE IS ANY APPREHENSION WITHIN THE GOP CONCERNING POSSIBLE NON-MUSLIM FOREIGN POWER MACHINATIONS AROUND THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE (ALTHOUGH ONE SOURCE CLOSE TO MRS. MARCOS TOLD US ON APRIL 21 THAT THERE IS TALK OF U.S. EFFORTS TO USE SAUDI ARABIA TO WORK AGAINST THE TRIPOLI ACCORD). WHATEVER THE REASON, THE EDUCATION AND PERSUASION OF THE U.S. CONCERNING THESE CONFIDENTIAL

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NEGOTIATIONS SEEMED TO BE AN IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION IN ENRILE'S MIND.

8. ACCORDING OTHER NON-GOP SOURCES, TALKS ARE NOT GOING AS WELL AS ENRILE' OPTIMISM SUGGESTS. THEY SAY TALKS ARE STALEMATED ON MAIN ISSUES (STATUS OF REFERENDUM, AREA OF AUTONOMY, ETC.) AND THAT PARTICIPANTS ARE FOCUSsing ON DETAILS WHICH SHOULD LOGICALLY BE LEFT FOR LATER.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
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Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2692802
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: DEFENSE SECRETARY EMPHASIZES THE POSITIVE IN CURRENT MNLF/ ISLAMIC/GOP NEGOTIATIONS
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, LY, RP, XF, MNLF, (ENRILE, JUAN PONCE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/24901c9f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009